

Commissioners now run show

Taking over supervision of jail and nursing home

By AARON ALDRIDGE
Staff Writer

The Sullivan County Commission has taken over supervision of the jail and the nursing home in the wake of the county manager's resignation.

"We're trying to take our own responsibility and be accountable," commissioner Jeff Barrette said Tuesday during a scheduled

county commissioner's meeting.

Ed Gil de Rubio announced his resignation Monday citing a difference of opinion with the commission on which direction to take the county.

The commission requested that all department heads, including jail superintendent Ross Cunningham and nursing home administrator Ted Purdy, attend the meeting to ask any questions

they may have about Gil de Rubio's departure.

"I just wanted to call everybody here to talk about it," Barrette said. "Basically, Ted and Ross will be reporting to us. With that will come some other changes."

Facilities director Greg Chanis was appointed interim county manager and will work closely with Gil de Rubio until his resignation becomes effective Dec. 31.

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Jeff Barrette

Sullivan County commissioner

"Part of the reason to pull the nursing home and jail out of the county manager's purview is to

give Greg more time with the budget," commissioner Ben

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Nelson said.

State Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, who attended the meeting as an observer, applauded the move toward direct supervision.

"I, too, think things should change for the better," Franklin said. "A lot more openness and transparency."

But Franklin warned the commission he was concerned about some aspects of department heads reporting directly.

"The danger is that some people might go to one commissioner and others go to another commissioner," Franklin said. "It shouldn't be willy-nilly."

County Register of Deeds Sharron King said she has not felt comfortable talking to the commissioners or with delegation members.

"I would love for all of us to come together as a team," King said. "So we can truly make Sullivan County function."

Purdy made his first report to the commission and said he projects a revenue shortfall at the nursing home of more than \$1.4 million for the current fiscal year.

"I think it's a conservative projection," Purdy said.

By taking over the supervision of the nursing home, Barrette said he hopes to lend a greater level of support and remove a layer of bureaucracy.

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When Barrette was asked how the commission would handle the projected shortfall, he said there was a twofold plan.

"First, we'll be filling the exterior coordinator's

position," Barrette said. "And second, we'll curb expenses where I believe the true deficit is."

Barrette also said there are no plans to lay off personnel.

"There is the potential for a nonhealth care hiring freeze," Barrette said.

Cunningham also gave his first report and requested permission to expend money from the jail commissary budget to fund inmate services.

Franklin interjected and asked the commission how it could authorize expending money without permission.

"The commissary money is not in the budget," commissioner Ethel Jarvis said. "But it will be next year."

Cunningham then announced that he promoted a corrections officer to sergeant when Franklin questioned the move.

"It's not in the budget," Franklin said.

Cunningham disagreed and proceeded to explain to Franklin how he was able to promote an officer and stay within his budget.

During the first county manager report from Chanis, he had little to say.

"One of the short-term goals is to streamline the budget," Chanis said. "The other is to open the lines of communication."

The commission is continuing its work on presenting about \$800,000 in funds it hopes to freeze in the current year's budget to the executive finance committee before the end of the year.

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